

Maryland. The child knew his mother only briefly; they were cruelly separated when he was young. He knew his father only by the rumors. He didn't even know the exact day of his birth. Yes, even his birthday—for many of us, that foundational aspect of identity—was denied him by the cruel master of slavery.

This slave was whipped and beaten. His days were filled with toil. His nights were filled with restless turning on a packed dirt floor. But that is not where the story ends—no, it is only the beginning of the incredible life of Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist, orator, and one of the greatest Americans ever to live. As Douglass would later write in his memoirs, “You have seen how a man was made a slave. You shall see how a slave was made a man.”

For all its terrible might—its bloodhounds and its implements of torture—slavery was not built to withstand Frederick Douglass, just as it was not built to withstand the universal desire for freedom that lies within the heart of man.

Douglass knew that the first step to freedom was education, so he taught himself to read in secrecy because slaves were punished for learning to read. Around the time he was 12, he got hold of an old textbook called “The Columbian Orator.” Little did Douglass know that around that same time, the same textbook was being studied on the Illinois prairie by a young man named Abraham Lincoln. In that textbook, Douglass found speeches by George Washington and Benjamin Franklin—men who revolted against tyranny to claim their liberty. In that book, he also found a fictional dialogue between a slave and his master where the master brought forward “the whole argument in behalf of slavery . . . all of which was disposed of by the slave.” Douglass wrote: This exchange “gave tongue to interesting thoughts of [his] soul.” It kindled his burning conviction that slavery was wrong and he must escape it. From that moment on, Douglass was a grave threat to the very institution of slavery itself. He was free in his own mind.

Douglass’ journey “from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom” would go through many dramatic twists and turns before its conclusion. When a notorious slave breaker tried to beat him for disobeying orders, Douglass wrestled him into submission. He insisted on being treated as a man, and from that day forward, he was never whipped again.

Douglass’ first attempt at escape was a failure, thwarted at the last minute by a betrayal of confidence. He did not fail a second time. In 1838, traveling in disguise under an assumed identity, Douglass took a steamboat north to the blessedness of freedom. At this point in the story, you might expect Douglass to fade from history, to enjoy a modest and tranquil life with his wife and his children. But no—the former slave, who taught himself to read

through the words of Cicero and Washington, went on to be history’s most eloquent witness against slavery. He denounced the bloody institution in 1,000 speeches and from the pages of his own abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, and he denounced slavery firmly from inside the American tradition.

Like many radical abolitionists, at times Frederick Douglass was profoundly ambivalent about his own country. Indeed, there was a time in his early adulthood when he affirmatively hated the United States, preferring disunion to union with slaveholders. But Frederick Douglass later came to a different conclusion about America. When he read the Nation’s founding documents, he did not find codified defenses of slavery; to the contrary, he found that the compromises the Founders had made to slavery were meant to undermine that institution over time, not to sustain it. What Douglass found in the Founders was quite different from what he had expected to find. He later said: Their message “is ‘We the people’; not we the white people, not even we the citizens, not we the privileged class, not we the high, not we the low, but we the people.”

Douglass was an activist, yes, a militant, yes, who led recruiting drives for Black soldiers during the Civil War. But for all of his righteous anger, he did not want to cast aside the principles of his country. Douglass knew that the most powerful antidote to injustice was found within the American tradition, with its insistence on natural rights for all men.

Douglass wrote:

From the first, I saw no chance of bettering the condition of the freedman until he should cease to be merely a freedman and should become a citizen. . . . The liberties of the American people [are] dependent upon the ballot-box, the jury-box, and the cartridge-box; that without these no class of people could live and flourish in this country.

Frederick Douglass has many lessons to teach us if we are willing to listen. I would like to highlight just one more, which I think is especially relevant to us today.

At the end of his famous autobiography, Frederick Douglass contrasted two societies: the slaveholder society he was born into and the northern society where he was reborn in freedom.

The slave society he described was built on force and fraud. Its religion had been perverted to serve earthly idols. Its families were torn apart at the auction block. Its workers toiled to no reward. This society had been poisoned by its rejection of the American creed, by its insistence that all men are not created equal. Indeed, it had become an authoritarian society that policed movement, association, even intimacy. And for what? To protect a hideous falsehood.

The free society Douglass described was different. Here, a man could hold an honest job, and he worked because his work was rewarded, not because he

feared punishment. Here, a runaway slave could make a name for himself, rising to a position of esteem in his community through his service. Here, a family could put down roots and flourish.

Those are two very different societies, guided by very different beliefs. One is a weak community hiding behind a show of strength. The other is a strong and free community with absolutely nothing to hide.

Today we are blessedly free from the institution of slavery, but our communities have their own problems. The American family is in crisis. Our prisons are full, and our pews are empty. Heroin and opioids enslave millions. Many more are killed before they even get the chance to live.

Yes, we have our own battles to fight. In too many ways, we have fallen short of the high principles upon which our Nation was built. That ultimately is why the legacy of Frederick Douglass is so very important. He implored his generation to heal itself of its greatest disease. He calls upon us to do the same.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXII, all postcloture time on the Branch nomination expire at 4 p.m. today and the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate. Finally, if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:18 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). The Senator from Ohio.

HONORING OFFICERS ANTHONY MORELLI AND ERIC JOERING

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I would like to talk today about two

brave Ohioans who were tragically killed while serving their community and all of us.

On Saturday, February 10, Ohio lost two of its finest when Westerville Police Officers Anthony Morelli and Eric Joering were fatally shot responding to a 9-1-1 call. They rushed to the scene. When they arrived, they were under fire. Officer Joering was killed at the scene. Officer Morelli died in surgery later that day.

Officer Morelli was a 29-year veteran of the Westerville Police Department. He leaves behind his wife Linda, their daughter Beth, and son Chris. Officer Joering was a 16-year veteran of the Westerville Police Department, where he was a K-9 officer partnered with his dog Sam.

Eric loved working with Sam, but what he really loved were his kids and his wife. His most important job, he said, was being a husband and a father. He is survived by his wife Jami and his beautiful daughters Eva, Elena, and Ella.

Both men were loved and respected members of the Westerville community, and both will be sorely missed. I had a chance to talk to a number of their fellow officers, their colleagues, over the weekend and heard many stories about them, their bravery, and their commitment to service.

I also had the great honor to meet with the families of both of these fallen officers over this past weekend in Columbus, OH. Linda Morelli and Jami Joering are incredibly strong women and incredibly strong mothers. I expressed my thanks from all Ohioans for their husbands' service. I also had a chance to talk to four of the five children about their fathers' exemplary service; that they had fallen in service to all of us and how much we appreciated them.

The U.S. Capitol has flags that are flown for special occasions, and two flags were flown in honor of the sacrifices these two good men made protecting the people of Ohio.

Throughout this tragic situation, I will say the people of Central Ohio and, frankly, across the Nation have stepped up in big ways to support and assist these two families. I am encouraged by the kindness and generosity we have seen.

I want to take a moment to just say that these two brave officers, Tony Morelli and Eric Joering, were the best. They made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us. Today, we hold their families up in prayer.

(The remarks of Mr. PORTMAN pertaining to the introduction of S. 2456 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. PORTMAN. I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

TAX REFORM

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, tax reform is working. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act has been the law of the land

for just 2 months, but it is already helping American workers.

When it came time to draft tax reform legislation, we had one objective, and that was to make hard-working Americans' lives better. To accomplish that, we focused on two important priorities.

First, we focused on immediately increasing Americans' take-home pay. We lowered tax rates across the board, we nearly doubled the standard deduction, and we doubled the child tax credit. All of those provisions went into effect on January 1, and by the end of this month, according to the IRS, 90 percent of the American people should see lower paychecks.

While immediate relief for hard-working Americans was crucial, we wanted more than that. We wanted to give the American people access to the kinds of jobs and the kinds of wages and opportunities that would set them up for long-term security. We wanted to give them the kinds of jobs and wages where they wouldn't be forced to choose between sending their kids to college and saving for a secure retirement or between paying the mortgage or medical bills. So in addition to lowering the tax burden on Americans directly, we set about improving the playing field for American businesses so that we could make things better for American workers.

Needless to say, in order for American workers to thrive, the American economy has to thrive, and that means that American businesses have to thrive. It is pretty hard for a small business to hire a new worker or to raise wages if the owner can barely pay the tax bill. It is unlikely that an American company is going to have a lot of spare cash for investing in its workforce if it is struggling to compete with foreign companies that are paying far less in taxes. It is unlikely that America's global companies are going to focus on reinvesting in the United States if they face a tax penalty for bringing foreign earnings back home. So we lowered our Nation's massive corporate tax rate, which, up until January 1, was the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. We lowered tax rates across the board for owners of small- and medium-sized businesses, farms, and ranches. We expanded business owners' ability to recover investments they make in their businesses, which will free up cash that they can reinvest into their operations and their workers. We brought the U.S. international tax system into the 21st century by replacing our outdated worldwide system with a modernized territorial tax system so that American businesses are not operating at a disadvantage next to their foreign competitors.

The goal in all of this was to free up businesses to increase their investments in the American economy and in American workers, and that is exactly what businesses are doing. The list of tax reform good news keeps growing—

wage increases, new jobs, increased investment, bonuses, benefit increases, and the list goes on and on.

Take utility bills. Lower utility bills might not be the first result we think of from tax reform, but tax reform is saving utility companies money, and they are passing those savings on to consumers.

Washington, DC, radio station WTOP reports:

In a flip-flop related to tax reform, [utility company] Pepco now says it wants to cut rates instead of raise them.

In December and January, the utility announced plans to raise rates in D.C. and Maryland respectively. . . . But the sweeping Federal tax bill signed into law late last year meant a significant tax savings for the utility. As a result, Pepco is now asking the Maryland Public Service Commission to approve a rate cut.

That is right—they were talking about a rate increase, but now they are talking about a rate cut in their utility rates.

Take this story from the Daily Energy Insider titled "Federal Tax Cut More Than Reverses Eversource Rate Increase in Massachusetts."

The Daily Energy Insider:

Many Eversource Energy electricity customers in Massachusetts who were expecting to see a rate increase this year instead will see a rate reduction because of the recent Federal corporate tax cut.

"What was expected to be about a \$36 million annual rate increase has turned into a \$20 million annual decrease," said the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities.

In my home State of South Dakota, Black Hills Energy in Rapid City is working with regulators to pass tax savings on to South Dakotans. So far, utility companies in at least 39 States are passing tax savings on to consumers, and that can be a real help to family budgets. Everybody knows how much gets spent out of every family's budget on utilities, on energy, and certainly in my part of the country in South Dakota, with the cold winters, that is even amplified. It can be a real help to family budgets, particularly families who are living paycheck to paycheck.

In Florida, Florida Power and Light Company announced that thanks to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, it will no longer require its customers to pay a surcharge for Hurricane Irma restoration. Instead, the company reports:

Florida Power and Light plans to apply federal tax savings toward the \$1.3 billion cost of Hurricane Irma restoration, which will save each of Florida Power and Light's 4.9 million customers an average of approximately \$250.

Thanks to tax reform, good news for American workers seems to just pour in daily, whether it is lower utility bills, new jobs, bonuses, or, as Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina announced last week, lower rate increases on health insurance.

I am proud that tax reform is accomplishing our goal of making life better for hard-working Americans, and I look forward to seeing even more benefits for American workers in the weeks and months to come.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATIONS OF RYAN NELSON AND SUSAN COMBS

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, as chairman of the Senate Western Caucus and as a Montanan, I am here to urge the swift confirmation of two outstanding nominations to serve in the Department of the Interior. The first is Ryan Nelson, a native of Idaho Falls, ID, as Solicitor of the Department of the Interior. The second is Susan Combs, a rancher from Big Bend, TX. She is nominated to be Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget.

Both of these positions are critical to managing our public lands and wildlife. Yet these two well-qualified individuals have been waiting in a bureaucratic limbo. Mr. Nelson was first nominated over 209 days ago, and Ms. Combs received her first nomination over 231 days ago.

Mr. Nelson is a great choice to serve as Solicitor. He is a westerner, and he spends time fishing and hunting with his family in Idaho. He understands our western way of life, and he has the work experience to make sure our public lands are managed and protected in the right way.

His service includes serving as clerk on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, serving as special counsel for the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Justice.

At the Department of Justice, he worked to defend vital Federal programs and oversaw many complex cases involving our natural resources, wildlife, and environment. He also compelled polluters to limit harmful emissions into the air and worked with then-Solicitor of the Department of the Interior David Bernhardt on the listing decision for the polar bear. Like Mr. Bernhardt, Ryan is capable of upholding the law and the science, even when it is not easy.

If you want someone who values conservation, who knows the appropriate use of laws, like the Antiquities Act and the Endangered Species Act, then Ryan is your guy. The Department of the Interior needs Ryan's expertise to help make the best decisions possible for the benefit of our natural resources and the people and wildlife living around them. His confirmation must be prioritized.

Ms. Combs is also exactly the right person for the job to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Manage-

ment and Budget. Ms. Combs has had a long and successful career both in business and in public service, including as a member of the Texas House of Representatives, as Texas's agriculture commissioner, and as Texas's comptroller of public accounts. Her proven management track record in public service and in business is crucial to making the Department of the Interior more efficient and effective to help ensure the responsible stewardship of western lands.

Both Mr. Nelson's and Ms. Combs's nominations have been pending longer than any of their predecessors—now listen to this—over the past 25 years. This is not just bad governance; it is a complete lack of governance. Here is the problem. When you have qualified individuals like Mr. Nelson and like Ms. Combs who wait in this bureaucratic limbo for this long, it then puts them in a position to, maybe, find other employment. We need to find the best people who are willing to serve in these positions, and we need to give them the respect of moving them through quickly so that we can keep them with the thought of entering public service.

Colleagues, it is time to get the job done and move these critical nominations across the finish line.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

GUN SAFETY

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, this morning, I had the opportunity to meet with some extraordinary young people. These were students from Parkland, FL, who attend the school where the mass shooting took place 2 weeks ago. What was amazingly impressive about these young people is that in the midst of their grief, in the midst of the unbelievably traumatic experience that they went through in seeing their best friends being shot and wounded in cold blood and their teachers killed, they resolved not just to mourn and grieve for their friends and neighbors; they resolved to stand up and fight back and come to Washington, go to Tallahassee, FL, and go around the country to do everything they can to make certain that no more children—no more young people—are mowed down and slaughtered in schools.

Nobody thinks that the issue of gun safety is going to be an easy issue to solve. There are literally hundreds of millions of guns throughout this country, and there are 5 million assault weapons throughout this country today. Tragically, there are many thousands of people, I expect in every State in this country, who are walking our streets and are at their wits end emotionally, who are suicidal, who are homicidal. Many of those people have access to guns and guns of mass destruction. I think that in some respects, the slaughter at the high school in Parkland, FL, was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back.

Several months ago, the American people were stunned to see some very

sick person in Las Vegas break a window and start mowing down people. He killed some 58 Americans and wounded 500 people within a period of a few minutes. That was on top of Sandy Hook. It was on top of so many gun slaughters that, I think, what has finally happened—maybe because of the extraordinary efforts of these young people from Parkland—the American people are saying that enough is enough, that we have a difficult problem. We may not be able to solve it completely overnight, but we have a moral obligation to do everything we can to make certain that no more children—no more people in this country—are mowed down by some sick person with a weapon.

That is not just I who is talking, and it is not just the young people from the high school in Florida. It is pretty much what the American people want. Let me refer the Presiding Officer to a few polls that were conducted fairly recently.

A Quinnipiac poll was done on February 20, just a week ago. This is what that poll showed.

It showed that 97 percent of the American people support universal background checks, which is not a radical idea. What the American people are saying and what gun owners are saying is that we should keep guns out of the hands of people who are not responsible and should not own guns. Universal background checks are almost universally supported by the American people.

In that same Quinnipiac poll, 83 percent of the American people indicated support for a mandatory waiting period for all gun purchases. You don't want somebody who is angry, who is upset, or who had something terrible happen to go running to a gun store, buying a gun, and then going out and using it.

There are 75 percent who, basically, want the Congress to address the issue of gun violence and to start taking action.

There are 67 percent of the people polled by Quinnipiac who support a nationwide ban on the sale of assault weapons. They believe and I believe that assault weapons are designed as military weapons to kill human beings. That is what those weapons are designed to do. I believe and have believed for 30 years—and a majority of the American people believe—that we should end the sale and distribution of those weapons. That was in a Quinnipiac poll.

According to a CNN poll that was done more recently, just a few days ago on February 25, 70 percent of the American people want stricter gun laws. This is the highest number that CNN has registered since way back when the Brady Bill passed, in 1993.

According to CNN, 87 percent support laws to prevent convicted felons and the mentally ill from owning guns. There are 71 percent who support banning anyone under the age of 21 from buying a gun. There are 63 percent who

support a ban on the sale and possession of high-capacity magazines. There are 57 percent who support an assault weapons ban, and 56 percent say that stricter gun laws would reduce gun-related deaths.

We have a difficult issue which is not going to be solved overnight, and nobody thinks that it will. Yet the American people are demanding that we have the courage to stand up to the NRA and finally take some action that will move us in the right direction. Let me just suggest some of the ways I believe we should go forward in a bipartisan way.

Once again, the American people believe and I believe in universal background checks. That means, among other things, ending the so-called gun show loophole, because background checks don't mean anything if somebody can go to a gun show or on the internet and buy weapons without undergoing any background check. Overwhelmingly, the American people say that before somebody is able to purchase a gun, we need to know: Is the person a killer? Is he a person who has engaged in domestic violence? Is he somebody who has a history of mental health problems? If that is the case, that person should not be buying a gun.

I think serious gun safety legislation must include addressing the so-called straw man purchases. This is a provision by which people can legally go to gun shops, buy the weapons that they want, but then they are going to sell those weapons or distribute those weapons to people who should not be owning those weapons and who could not have purchased those weapons on their own. I have indicated it is my view that we should ban assault weapons in this country—weapons that are designed for no other purpose but to kill human beings.

Furthermore, I think it is clear that we are a nation that is facing a mental health crisis. I know that in my office—and I expect in the offices of other Senators—we get calls all of the time from people who say: I am worried about my husband. I am worried about my brother. He is at his wits end. I don't know what he is going to do to himself or what he is going to do to somebody else. We have been searching for mental health treatment, but we cannot find anything that is available now or that we can afford.

I believe we should be moving forward to pass legislation which says that Americans who suffer today from mental health crises should be able to get the mental healthcare they need now, not 2 months from now, because 2 months from now may be too late.

We also need to address the fact that, every year, women are being killed by their husbands or their boyfriends and that if somebody is a stalker, if somebody is convicted of domestic violence, if somebody is under a restraining order, we should be clear that that person should not be owning a gun. This is just some of what I think needs to be done.

We are at a moment when the American people have had it up to here. They do not want to turn on their TVs tomorrow or next week or next month and see the horrible, unspeakable things that we have seen in schools throughout this country.

At this particular moment in history, I hope that in a bipartisan way we can come together and do what the American people want us to do, which is to pass commonsense gun safety legislation that is supported by the overwhelming majority of the American people.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NET NEUTRALITY

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I would like to speak on behalf of my constituents and the tens of millions of Americans who rely on a free and open internet.

Make no mistake, we are locked in a historic battle to preserve the core principles of competition, innovation, and consumer choice that have made the internet the world's greatest platform for commerce and communications; a historic battle to restore the hallmark of American innovation and democratization; a historic battle to protect America's innovation incubator and job generator—a battle for net neutrality.

In December, the Trump FCC, the Federal Communications Commission, eliminated net neutrality. These rules prevented your internet service provider—Comcast, Verizon, AT&T, and Charter—from indiscriminately charging more for internet fast lanes or slowing down or even blocking certain websites entirely, the very rules that allow inventors, entrepreneurs, and small businesses, the lifeblood of the American economy, to connect to the internet.

The reason why is simple. The Trump administration sides with the rich and the powerful first and consistently puts everyday American lives last. We have seen them wage an all-out assault on healthcare, on climate change, and now on net neutrality, but today the internet is fighting back, and we have a powerful tool at our disposal that will allow the average consumer to have their voices heard right here on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

Today I am officially introducing a CRA—Congressional Review Act—resolution that will fully restore net neutrality. The entire Senate Democratic caucus is now standing with the millions of Americans who want to reverse the FCC's partisan actions and restore net neutrality.

Net neutrality is not and should not be a partisan issue. I thank Senator SUSAN COLLINS for supporting my CRA, and I encourage other Republican colleagues to stand with all of us who support net neutrality. We are just one vote away in the Senate from restoring net neutrality. There will be a vote right here on the floor of the Senate sometime this spring. The clock is ticking. We just need a simple majority for passage, and that is just one more vote.

When we take that vote, every one of my colleagues will have to answer the simple question: Whose side are you on? Do you stand with hard-working American families for whom the internet is essential or do you stand with the Big Money corporate interests and their army of lobbyists? We should all be on the right side of history.

Millennials are motivated. Momentum is building. Citizens are joining together demonstrating, writing letters, calling their Members of Congress, and taking this message to social media. They are joined by groups that include Fight for the Future, Demand Progress, Free Press, the Center for Digital Technology, the Center for Media Justice, Color of Change, Common Cause, Consumers Union, Engine, the National Hispanic Media Coalition, the Open Technology Institute, Public Knowledge, and many others out across the country that are organizing right now as part of an effort that is going to bring millions of voices into the offices of every Senator and every House Member in our country.

This fight is not limited to the Halls of Congress. We are seeing a historic groundswell of activity at the State and local level. The Governors in Hawaii, New Jersey, Vermont, Montana, and New York have issued executive orders promoting net neutrality.

State legislatures in more than half of the United States are currently considering net neutrality legislation. Just today, 76 mayors across the Nation signed a letter opposing net neutrality repeal, and 23 State attorneys general have filed suit to reinstate the rule, and we plan to stand by them throughout this entire battle, in the court and out here on the floor of Congress.

We cannot let net neutrality be another example of Congress disregarding public opinion and putting donor interests first. Net neutrality is our 21st century right, and we will fight to protect it. In fact, 83 percent of all Americans in polling say they want to protect net neutrality. By the way, that is pretty much every millennial, because for millennials, the internet is like oxygen. I will say that if you are 35 years old or younger, the poll is at pretty close to 100 percent.

I can see all the pages nodding their heads as I am speaking. They know no life without a device that they are carrying around. This is the world in which we are living, and they do not want to have any discrimination introduced into the relationship they

have between the internet and their ability to control their own lives. That is what the battle is all about, those nodding heads of the pages in the well of the Senate. Those are the people who are going to be making a difference, the millennials, the generation Z young people who want this to be open for entrepreneurial activity and for democracy.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. President, I also want to speak for a few moments about the epidemic of gun violence in our country. Almost 2 weeks ago, a 19-year-old armed with an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, and killed 14 students and 3 teachers, and 14 others were injured. Time and again, we have seen this tragedy play out and time and again we are seeing Congress fail to act.

Each year we lose 33,000 American lives due to gun violence. In instances of disease, illness, natural disaster, this level of widespread death would be met with immediate and meaningful action by Congress. Yet we continually abdicate our moral responsibility when it comes to gun violence prevention. We don't have to accept this epidemic of gun violence in our country. It is not preordained. It is preventable.

So what should Congress do?

First, we should allow public health researchers to study the causes of gun violence so they can find solutions to this public health crisis. Right now, zero dollars are spent at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on gun violence prevention research. That is because since 1996, an appropriations rider has prohibited the Centers for Disease Control from advocating or promoting gun control.

Just last week, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar said he would not let the rider impede the CDC's research into the causes of gun violence. So there is no reason now not to fully fund this critical research agenda.

I have introduced legislation to fund research into the causes and prevention of gun violence. My bill now has 32 cosponsors in the Senate. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to cosponsor this commonsense bill. It is long past time that we treat gun violence like the public health emergency it is, but we must also keep guns out of the hands of those who should not have them.

Currently, anyone can use a handgun in America—whether it is the gun's owner, a thief, or, tragically, a young child, but it doesn't have to be this way. Technology exists now that can authorize handgun use only by its owner. In the 21st century, we have to use advances in technology to our advantage, and we can save lives by using it.

That is why I used the opportunity to introduce smart gun legislation that will require all handguns manufactured in the United States to be personalized

for operation only by the authorized user. That means, unless you are authorized by fingerprint or other technology, you will not be able to fire that handgun. If we can do it for an iPhone, we should be able to do it for a handgun so that if a child gets ahold of a gun, if it is not their thumb, they cannot fire it. If someone steals a gun from a home, it will not work because it will not be their thumb that is on the barrel of that gun. That is ultimately a way to reduce dramatically the amount of harm we see in our country.

We must also ban these military-style assault weapons like the AR-15, which are the guns of choice for those who seek to inflict mass casualties on civilians. These are weapons that belong in combat, not in our communities.

We must also pass legislation to ensure that all gun purchases include a background check. In fact, 97 percent of all Americans now support expanded background checks—97 percent of all Americans. No one should be able to purchase a gun through Facebook or Instagram without a background check. Instagram should not mean "Instagun," with no background check. That is crazy. That is crazy. You can go on Instagram and buy a gun without a background check. That is crazy in America in 2018.

We have the capacity to quickly do background checks to be able to find out whether somebody should be able to purchase a gun. It is crazy not to have that kind of a system put in place.

If you can buy a gun on Instagram, we should be able to check online whether or not that person, in fact, should be allowed legally to purchase the gun.

Let's close the gun show loophole, as well as the one that allows someone on the terrorist watch list to purchase a weapon. Let's close the loophole that allows domestic abusers to buy guns. Let's close the loophole that allows straw purchasers to buy guns and flood our streets with them. Let's ban bump stocks. Let's repeal the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, or PLCAA, and take away the gun manufacturers' immunity from civil liability. These are sensible steps.

What is not sensible is hoping that thoughts and prayers will prevent the next shooting. This generation of young people recognize this truth, and that is why they are leading this children's crusade. They are picking up microphones and raising their voices. They are saying enough is enough. It is my hope that this might just be the movement that pushes Republican leaders, once and for all, to take action on gun violence and make the NRA stand for "not relevant anymore" in American politics. This is the time for that to take place on the Senate floor.

This generation of young people is rising up, and they are demanding that we protect this country from the

scourge of gun violence. Like generations past, this one is making the change they want to see in our society.

So, to them, let me say: I hear you. I am with you, and I will fight with you to ensure that not one more student has to endure what you did, not one more person has to be damaged because we did not put the laws on the books that should have been there to prevent this harm from occurring. I will fight with you to ensure that this does not happen in one more school in our country.

That is our challenge. That is the goal we should set. That is what should be the agenda here on the floor of the Senate in 2018.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

NO-FLY LIST GUN LEGISLATION

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I rise today in support of bipartisan legislation aimed at ensuring that those individuals who are on the Department of Homeland Security's no-fly list are likewise not able to have access to guns. I just met with several of the students from the shooting at the school in Florida and heard the very compelling case they have made to take this issue seriously and do what we can on a commonsense basis to make it more difficult for those who shouldn't have guns to have guns.

Regardless of what happened in Florida these past couple of weeks, this is a measure we should have taken before. It has been brought to the floor of the Senate, and it has received majority support here. I think it is simply common sense that someone who is not permitted to fly in this country and is considered by the Federal Government to be a potential threat to national security should not be allowed to purchase a firearm.

The no-fly list and the selectee list that we are talking about is composed of those who are not allowed to fly. With the selectee list, it is those who require additional screening. These are both narrowly tailored, defined, targeted lists.

This restriction would affect just a small number of people, all of whom would be afforded due process under the Constitution. Those who find themselves on either of these lists would have the authority to challenge that designation, and the onus would be on the government, not the individual; the onus would be on the government to justify the classification and to prove that they should not be allowed to purchase a firearm. These are strong, robust, due process protections that would make sure that these restrictions are constitutionally sound.

This bill also adds another layer of safety for citizens from those who would do us harm, ensuring that anyone who has been denied the right to fly cannot purchase a weapon without at least undergoing additional scrutiny. It simply stands to reason that if we fear that someone may use our commercial airlines as a weapon or to

harm those on board, we should not allow that same person to purchase a weapon without additional scrutiny.

I encourage my colleagues to review this bipartisan legislation and to join me, along with Senator COLLINS and a number of our colleagues here—a bipartisan group of Senators—in supporting this commonsense piece of legislation.

I hope we will have a debate on some of these measures. I will be talking in the coming days about some of the other measures that we ought to take to make sure that we don't put guns in the hands of those who shouldn't have them.

My heart goes out to those in Florida, and my vote will go here to measures that will make schools safer.

I yield the floor.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, today the Senate is voting to confirm Judge Elizabeth Branch to serve as a U.S. circuit court judge for the Eleventh Circuit. Judge Branch was favorably reported out of the Judiciary Committee on a 19-2 bipartisan vote. She has broad bipartisan support from her home State of Georgia. The American Bar Association rated Judge Branch as unanimously well-qualified. If the Senate confirms Judge Branch, as I am confident it will, she will be the fourth woman confirmed by the Senate to the Federal courts of appeals in the 115th Congress, three more than the one woman confirmed at this point in President Obama's first term.

Judge Branch's judicial career and broad range of legal experiences have well prepared her to serve on the Eleventh Circuit. Judge Branch was appointed to the Georgia Court of Appeals in 2012. In her time on the appellate bench, she has participated in over 1,500 cases. Before joining the bench, Judge Branch spent several years in private practice. She also served in government, including her role as a top lawyer for the Department of Homeland Security. Judge Branch received her B.A. from Davidson College and her J.D. from Emory. After law school, Judge Branch clerked for Judge Owen Forrester on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia.

As I noted earlier, if confirmed, Judge Branch will become the fourth female circuit court judge confirmed under President Trump. Her confirmation puts her in good company, joining a class of first-rate female jurists and legal scholars. She will join a group that includes: Seventh Circuit Judge Amy Coney Barrett, a former professor at Notre Dame University Law School and law clerk to Justice Scalia; Tenth Circuit Judge Allison Eid, a former Colorado Supreme Court Justice and law clerk to Justice Thomas; and Sixth Circuit Judge Joan Larsen, another clerk of Justice Scalia and former Michigan Supreme Court justice. I am confident that Judge Branch will serve as an excellent addition to this outstanding class of female circuit court judges.

Judge Branch's impressive background and bipartisan support suggest

that she will be an excellent court of appeals judge. I am pleased to support her nomination today.

Mr. FLAKE. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FLAKE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Under the previous order, all postcloture time is expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Branch nomination?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), and the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SUL-LIVAN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Alabama (Mr. JONES) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JOHNSON). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 73, nays 23, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 38 Ex.]

YEAS—73

Alexander	Feinstein	Moran
Baldwin	Fischer	Murkowski
Barrasso	Flake	Nelson
Bennet	Gardner	Paul
Blunt	Graham	Perdue
Boozman	Grassley	Portman
Burr	Hassan	Risch
Capito	Hatch	Roberts
Cardin	Heitkamp	Rubio
Carper	Heller	Sasse
Casey	Hirono	Scott
Cassidy	Hoeven	Shaheen
Cochran	Inhofe	Shelby
Collins	Isakson	Smith
Coons	Johnson	Tester
Corker	Kaine	Thune
Cornyn	Kennedy	Tillis
Cotton	King	Toomey
Crapo	Klobuchar	Van Hollen
Cruz	Lankford	Warner
Daines	Leahy	Whitehouse
Donnelly	Lee	Wicker
Durbin	Manchin	Young
Enzi	McCaskey	
Ernst	McConnell	

NAYS—23

Blumenthal	Heinrich	Sanders
Booker	Markey	Schatz
Brown	Menendez	Schumer
Cantwell	Merkley	Stabenow
Cortez Masto	Murphy	Udall
Duckworth	Murray	Warren
Gillibrand	Peters	Wyden
Harris	Reed	

NOT VOTING—4

Jones	Rounds
McCain	Sullivan

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to re-

consider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Russell Vought, of Virginia, to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Mitch McConnell, Pat Roberts, Roy Blunt, Shelley Moore Capito, Thom Tillis, Richard Burr, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Crapo, Orrin G. Hatch, John Barrasso, Johnny Isakson, Michael B. Enzi, John Boozman, Mike Rounds, James M. Inhofe, John Thune, Lindsey Graham.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Russell Vought, of Virginia, to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Alabama (Mr. JONES) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 49, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 39 Ex.]

YEAS—49

Alexander	Fischer	Paul
Barrasso	Flake	Perdue
Blunt	Gardner	Portman
Boozman	Graham	Risch
Burr	Grassley	Roberts
Capito	Hatch	Rubio
Cassidy	Heller	Sasse
Cochran	Hoeven	Scott
Collins	Inhofe	Shelby
Corker	Isakson	Sullivan
Cornyn	Johnson	Thune
Cotton	Kennedy	Tillis
Crapo	Lankford	Toomey
Cruz	Lee	Wicker
Daines	McConnell	Young
Enzi	Moran	
Ernst	Murkowski	

NAYS—48

Baldwin	Carper	Feinstein
Bennet	Casey	Gillibrand
Blumenthal	Coons	Harris
Booker	Cortez Masto	Hassan
Brown	Donnelly	Heinrich
Cantwell	Duckworth	Heitkamp
Cardin	Durbin	Hirono